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## United States Senate

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June 5, 2012

The Honorable Gregory B. Jaczko, Chairman  
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
11555 Rockville Pike  
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear Mr. Jaczko,

I want to begin by thanking you for your service to the country and your unwavering advocacy for safety in the nuclear industry. As you know well, many of the unique risks inherent in using nuclear power were thrust into the public eye by the accident at Fukushima-Dai-ichi and I think everyone recognizes the need to apply what we have learned from the tragedy to the United States' own nuclear program. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) has already begun this process with the investigation of the Near-Term Task Force (NTTF) and subsequent regulatory orders implementing some of their recommendations. I urge the commission to build upon this work by strongly considering action requiring the installation of filtered containment vents. Immediate action is needed to make our nation's nuclear facilities the safest in the world.

As you know, one of the lessons drawn from the Fukushima aftermath is the inability of plant operators to open containment vents on the reactor, which led to a dangerous build-up of hydrogen gas and eventually, to an explosion. Less reported is the fact that the order to open the vents was delayed because operators were worried about contamination from the release of hydrogen gas.<sup>1</sup> If the vents were properly equipped with filters, operators would not have been worried about releasing contamination and may have started the process to open the vents sooner.

However unlikely a 'Fukushima-type' event in the US may be, it seems eminently reasonable to require containment vent filters to limit the release of radioactive material. Such thinking is not outside the mainstream and in fact, numerous countries such as Germany, France, and Sweden have all taken action to install filtered vents on their reactors.<sup>2</sup> Here in the US, Former Assistant Director of National Security for the White House Office of Science and Technology, Frank Von Hippel, has been advocating for filtered containment vents since the accident at Three Mile

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<sup>1</sup> New York Times "In Japan Reactor Failings, Danger Signs for the U.S." May 17, 2011  
(<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/18/world/asia/18japan.html>)

<sup>2</sup> Bloomberg "Japan to Install Vent System for Reactors After Fukushima Crisis" February 8, 2012  
(<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-02-08/japan-to-install-vent-system-for-reactors-after-fukushima-crisis.html>)

Island in 1979.<sup>3</sup> These pleas have been echoed by members of many public interest groups, including the Union of Concerned Scientists. Finally, your own staff at the NRC has prioritized the issue of filtered containment vents as a Tier 1 issue in a recent Staff Assessment dated February 22, 2012.<sup>4</sup>

I urge you to take your staff's recommendations seriously and consider requiring the implementation of filtered vents as soon as possible. The United States has long led the world in nuclear technology and by taking swift action we can set the bar for safety and security.

Sincerely,



ROBERT MENENDEZ  
UNITED STATES SENATOR

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<sup>3</sup> Huffington Post "Nuclear Safety Advocates Accuse Industry and Regulators of Foot-dragging on Basic Safety Measure" April 30, 2012 ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/30/nuclear-safety-advocates-\\_n\\_1464812.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/30/nuclear-safety-advocates-_n_1464812.html))

<sup>4</sup> SECY-12-0025